

Obesity and Fatty Liver in Children

"Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease" (NAFLD) is a condition that coincides with the ever-present, worldwide obesity epidemic. Though this illness has been well-documented in adults, its effects on children are less frequently discussed, leaving concerned parents with little information on how to protect their children's health. To learn more about this disease and how to prevent or alleviate its impacts on your child's wellbeing, see the information below.

What Exactly is Fatty Liver Disease?

The term "fatty liver disease" is not representative of a single condition, as it is a blanket term for two primary variations of poor liver health. The first form of this disease is due to alcoholism, so it is highly unlikely to apply to children. The other is known specifically as "nonalcoholic fatty liver disease," as noted above, which can be further divided into two types:

- **Simple fatty liver:** Fat is present in the liver; however, there is no significant inflammation or damage to the liver's cells. This does not typically cause notable damage or health complications.
- **Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH):** Inflammation and damage to liver cells co-occurs with fat in the liver. This can lead to serious health problems, including cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Preexisting conditions such as Kawasaki disease and multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) are of particular concern in those with NAFLD due primarily to the compounding inflammation symptoms. With Kawasaki disease, kids' blood vessels are likely to become inflamed throughout the body, including those of the liver. It most commonly affects children five years old and younger, but it can be treated if caught early. MIS-C also causes organ inflammation and can be deadly; however, many cases are treated before they become fatal.

Preventing NAFLD in Obese Children

Although many studies have alarmed parents to the health outlook of obese children with NAFLD, patients with poor outcomes are few and far between. However, make no mistake that kids who are overweight do face an increased risk of developing this condition and its associated symptoms (approximately one-third of obese children have NAFLD).

Thus, you must modify dietary habits and engage in aerobic exercise routines to prevent the development or worsening of this health problem. Consult your pediatrician to devise an effective plan to support your child's health.